



The Navajo Nation
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Roselyn Tso becomes the first Diné member to serve as the head of the Indian Health Service



PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez had the honor of joining U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra and Roselyn Tso, as she took the oath of office to become the first Navajo person to serve as the Director of the Indian Health Service at the Hubert H. Humphrey Building in Washington, D.C. on Sept. 27, 2022.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Tuesday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez had the honor of joining Roselyn Tso, as she took the oath of office to become the first Navajo person to serve as the Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS). Director Tso was also joined by her family as U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra administered the oath during the ceremony held at the Hubert H. Humphrey Building in Washington, D.C. As the new head of IHS, Director Tso will oversee the delivery of health care services to 2.6 million American Indians and

Alaska Natives, the management of \$7.4 billion in federal health care funds, and 15,000 IHS employees across the country.

“This is monumental to have the very first Navajo woman serve at the highest position within the Indian Health Service. Health care was promised to the Navajo people through our Treaty of 1868 with the federal government, which continues to guide our relationship with the United States to this day. Navajo women played a vital role in finalizing that treaty, but they do not often get the recognition for that. Now, we have an exceptionally qualified Diné woman who will help deliver that health care to all tribal nations across the country. Thank you to President Biden, our congressional delegation, and our Navajo people for their support. We are very proud of Director Tso and we congratulate her, her family, and all of her colleagues,” said President Nez.

Tso is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation from LeChee, Ariz. She is Deeschii'nii (Start of the Red Streak People) and born for Hashk'aa hadzohi (Yucca Fruit Strung Out). Her maternal grandfather is Tł'ogi Dine'e' (Zia Pueblo People) and her paternal grandfather is Tł'izí łání (Many Goats).



“It is my honor and privilege to serve as the next leader of the Indian Health Service. Throughout the confirmation process, I took time to reflect on the many challenges the agency has faced, including the ongoing challenge to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, which has plagued Indian Country over the past couple of years. While the IHS has made great strides to improve health care services, there are areas we must review and improve on. I am committed to working with our tribal and urban Indian organization partners, and our partners across the federal government, to continue raising the health status of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level,” said Director Tso following her confirmation by the Senate. She also thanked outgoing IHS Acting Director Elizabeth Fowler.

On April 12, 2021, President Nez delivered a letter to U.S. President Joe Biden requesting his support and nomination of Tso to lead the IHS, based on her experience and handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2022, President Biden officially nominated her for the position. She was confirmed by the U.S. Senate by unanimous consent on Sept. 21.

President Nez also testified in support of Tso’s nomination during a U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs hearing in May. During that hearing, Tso highlighted the priorities that she would undertake as the IHS Director including strengthening and streamlining health care services, improving tribal consultation, and improving accountability within IHS operations.

In addition, President Nez credits Director Tso's commitment to working together with the Navajo Nation and its health care professionals to help lower the number of COVID-19 infections and for helping the Navajo Nation to become one of the highest vaccinated populations in the world.

"This is a testament to the dedication and commitment that Director Tso has exemplified throughout her career, and particularly during her time with the Navajo Area IHS. Her collective efforts working side by side with our health care professionals laid the groundwork that catapulted her to this next level within IHS. On behalf of my wife, Second Lady Dottie Lizer and our family, we congratulate Director Tso and wish her many more blessings in her new role," said Vice President Lizer.

As the head of the Navajo Area IHS since 2019, Tso provided exemplary leadership in the administration of a comprehensive health care system. She began her career with the IHS in 1984. She previously served in various roles in the Portland Area, both at the service unit level as the Administrative Officer for the Yakama Service Unit and at the Area level as the Planning and Statistical Officer, Equal Employment Officer and Special Assistant to the Area Director.

In 2005, Tso assumed the role of Director with the Office of Tribal and Service Unit Operations for the Portland Area. In this position, she was responsible for the implementation of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act and worked directly with tribal nations. Tso also worked with the three urban programs in the Portland Area that provide services ranging from community health to comprehensive primary health care services. In addition, she previously served as Acting Director of the ODSCT in 2010 and 2016-2018.

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